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COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN TAMIL

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Comparison is made for "similarity" or 'degree'. Three basic comparative constructions are available in Tamil. They are equative, comparative, and relative superlative. Equative shows some similarity between the items compared, whereas, comparative and superlative show the qualitative or quantitative difference between the items compared. In the following examples, (1) is positive, (2) is equative, (3) is comparative and (4) is superlative.

(1) Kamalaa aḻakaaṉaval 'Kamala is beautiful'
(2) Kamalaa raataiyai poola aḻakaaṉaval 'Kamala is as beautiful as Radha
(3) Kamalaa raataiyai viṭa aḻakaaṉaval 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'
(4) Kamalaa anta peṇkaḷil aḻakaaṉaval 'Kamala is the most beautiful among those girls'

Manifestation of Degree :

Generally adjectives[1] and adverbs[2] stand to qualify or quantify nouns and verbs respectively. They themselves are basically intensified for degree. The sentence (1) can mean that Kamala is beautiful when compared with all other girls, Kamala is beautiful in comparison with the group of girls the speaker has in mind or Kamala is not ugly but beautiful. In this type of construction, since the standard of comparison (the item with which the subject is compared) is not specified, it is difficult to ascertain the superiority or inferiority of the quality of the subject (item that is compared). Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the quality of the subject is above average. The quality or quantity referred can be further intensified by intensifiers like

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1. The adjectives are two types: attributives and predicatives. The attributives end in—*a*. (e. g. *nalla* 'good', *aḻakiya* 'beautiful'). The attributives are capable of forming personal nouns. (e. g. *nallaval* 'good woman', *aḻakiyaval* 'beautiful woman'). A good number of adjectives are formed by adding *aaṉa* 'which become', and *uḷḷa* 'which is' (e. g. *alakaaṉa* 'beautiful', *alakuḷḷa* 'beautiful'). *aaṉa* and *uḷḷa* are the relativized forms of the verbs *aa* 'become' and *uḷ* 'to be' respectively. The predicatives can stand independently without being followed by the noun. (e. g. *aḻaku* 'beauty', *kaṭṭai* 'short', *niiḻam* 'long').

2. Many adverbs are formed by adding *aaka* or *aay* with the nouns denoting quantity or quality. (e. g. *alakaaka* 'nicely' *sulapamaaka* 'easily', *veekamaaka* 'speedily'). Some are formed by adding *— um* (e. g. *perikum* 'very much', *mikavum* 'very much').

rempa 'more', *mika*, 'more', *makaa* 'very', *evvaḷavoo* 'so much', *koncam* 'very little', etc.

(5) Kamalaa rempa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is very beautiful'
(6) Kamalaa koncam kaṭṭai 'Kamala is a bit short'

The implied standard in this type of construction is similar to the implied standard in the following type of construction in which the adverb is manifested for degree.

(7) Kamalaa veekamaaka naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked fast.'

The sentence means that the speed with which Kamala walks is more than the average speed of walking. The adverbial modifiers in this type of construction denote lesser or greater degree of the quality or quanity under consideration. The modifiers that generally used are : *niRaiya* 'fully', *nirampa* 'fully', *rempa* 'more', *kuuṭutal* 'more', *kuututalaaka* 'more'. *mikutiyaaka* 'plenteously', *mikavum* 'very much', *peritaaka* 'very much', *peritum* 'very much', *vekuvaaka* 'very much', *ciRitaaka* 'a little', *koncam* 'a little', *koncamaaka* 'a little', *aritaaka* 'rarely', *saRRu* 'slightly', *veekamaaka* 'speedily' *viraivaaka* 'speedily', *meṭuvaaka* 'slowly', mella 'slowly', etc.

Apart from the modifiers mentioned above, there are many ways of intensifying a quality or quantity under consideration. Note the following examples.

(8) Kamalaa ivvaḷvu muṭṭaaḷ 'Kamala is such a fool!'
(9) Kamalaa avvaḷavu muṭṭaaḷ 'Kamala is sucha fool!'
(10) Kamala evvaḷavu muṭṭaaḷ 'How foolish Kamala is!'

The exclamation expressed by the words *ivvaḷavu* 'this much', *avvaḷavu* 'that much' and *evvaḷavu* 'how much' stands for the intensification of quality or quantity under consideration. Similarly in the following examples the question words *evvaḷavoo* 'how much' and *ettaṉaiyoo* 'how many' stand for intensification.

(11) Kamalaa evvaḷavoo tiṉRaaḷ 'Kamala ate so much'
(12) Kamalaa ettaṉaiyoo taṭavai tooRRaaḷ 'Kamala failed so many times'

In the following examples *muḻuvatum* 'completely' and *oree* 'only' stand for intensification.

(13) avaṉ caṭṭai muḻuvatum aḻukku 'His shirt is very dirty'
(14) ankee oree kuuṭṭam 'There is too much ruch there'

In the following example iṉṉum 'still' refers back to the intensity of the present quality and stands as an intensifier of that quality.

(15) Kamala iṉṉum naṉRaaka paaṭuvaaḷ 'Kamala will sing still better' Sometimes the intensified degree is implied in the verb itself. Compare the following examples.

(16) Kamalaa veekamaaka naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked fast'

(17) Kamalaa ooṭiṉaaḷ 'Kamala ran'

veekamaaka naṭa 'walk fast' is equal to *ooṭu* 'run' in some contexts and so one can assume that *ooṭu* implies the feature 'fast'. Intensification is made by similies also.

(18) avaṉ oru cinkam 'He is a lion'

(19) avaṉ oru caattaaṉ 'He is a Satan'

The sentence (18) means 'He is courageous like a lion' and the sentence (19) means 'He is very bad like Satan'. The negation of a quality or quantity by *illai* 'not' affects intensification.

(20) avaṉ nallavaṉ illai 'He is not good'

(21) avaḷ aḻakaaṉavaḷ illai 'She is not beautiful'

In the following examples *koḷḷaam, teevalai, paravaayillai* and *moosamillai* donate a gradation of goodness in the decreasing order.

(22) anta maampaḻam nallatu 'That mango fruit is good.'

(23) anta maampaḻam koḷḷaam 'That mango fruit is all right'

(24) anta maampaḻam teevalai 'That mango fruit is all right.'

(25) anta maampaḻam paravaayillai 'That mango fuit is all right'

(26) anta maampaḻam moosamillai 'That mango is not bad'

(27) anta maampaḻam moosam 'That mango is bad'

Comparison of equality ;

If two or more items are found similar quantitatively or qualitatively, they can be subjected to comparison of equality. Sentence (2) *kamalaa raataiyai poola aḻakaaṉavaḷ* 'Kamala is as beautiful as Radha' shows the similarity between Kamala and Radha with reference to beauty. Here in this senence the standard of comparison is Radha, the item compared is Kamala, and the quality in terms of which the comparison is made (i. e. theme of comparison) is *aḻaku* 'beauty' The postposition *poola* 'like' (the comparator) is comparable to the English equative marker "as...as". *poola* is always postposed to the standard of comparison which is marked for accusative. The sentence construction of the example (2) resembles the English sentence "Kamala is a beautiful girl like Radha" rather than the senence "Kamala is as beautiful as Radha". In the written language one can see the use of *pooṉRu* in the place of *poola*. *pooṉRu* is not widely used now.

(28) kamalaa raataiyai pooṉRu aḻkaaṉvaḷ 'Kamala is as beautiful as Radha'

The following sentences can be interpreted in more than one way each since the theme of comparison is not specified for quality or quantity.

(29) kamalaa raataiyai poola naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked like Radha'

(30) kamalaavukku raataiyai poola ceelai irrukkiRatu 'Kamala has sarees like Radha'

Sentence (29) can mean that Kamala walked in the same manner, about the same distance or with the same speed as Radha. Similarly setence (30) can mean the following: Kamala has the same number of sarees as Radha; Kamala has the same saree like that of Radha (similar in quality, texture, colour, etc.). The ambiguity can be overcome to a certain extent by specifying the quality or quanity.

(31) kamala raatiyai poola veekamaay naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked fast as Radha'

(32) kamalaavukku raataiyai poola paccai ceelai irrukkiRatu 'Kamal has a green saree like Radha'

(33) kamalaavukku raataiyai poola pattu ceelai irukkiRatu 'Like Radha, Kamala has ten sarees'

Sentence (32) is still ambiguous in the sense that it can also mean 'Kamala has a green saree and Radha has a red saree (but the brand, quality, etc., of the two sarees are same).' Sentence (33) can also mean 'Kamala has ten sarees of the same quality like the one Radha has.' The reason for the ambiguity is that the standard of comparison is not specified for quality or quantity. The ambiguity can be overcome to some more extent by specifying the standard comparison also for quality or quantity.

(34) raataikku paccai ceelai irukkiRatu poola kamalavukkum paccai ceelai irrukkiRatu 'Kamala has a green saree as Radha has (a green saree)'

(35) raataikku pattu ceelai irukkiRatu poola kamalaavukkum pattu ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has ten sarees as Radha has (ten sarees)'

(36) raataikku pattu paccai ceelai irkkiRatu poola kamalaavukku pattu paccai ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has ten green srees as Radha has (ten green sarees)'

It seems as if these constructions are formed out of two sentences, one specifying the quality or quantity of item compared and another specifying the quality or quantity of standard of comparison, which are co-ordinated by *poola*.

In the following examples, equation is made by *poola* for two unequal quality or quantity.

(37) kamalaavukku raatiyiṭam irukkiRa oru ceelaiyai poola pattu ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has ten sarees like the one Radha has'

(38) kamalaavukku raataiyiṭam irukkiRa paccai ceelaiyai poola pattu paccai ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has ten (green) sarees like the green one Radha has'

(39) kamalaavukku raataiyiṭam irukkiRa pattu ceelaiyai poola oru ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has one saree like the ten sarees Radha has'

This is possible because the similarity can be made for the possession of same item, quality or quantity. Equation can be made by *poola*, even for the sameness in the quality of having a possession.

(40) raataikku pensil irukkiRatu poola kamalaavukku peenaa irukkiRatu 'Radha has a pencil, likewise Kamala has a pen'

The following example is ambiguous because 'feeling hungry' can be taken as a quality.

(41) kamalaavukku raataiyai poola pasi 'Kamala is as hungry as Radha'

The sentence (41) can be interpreted in two ways : Kamala is as hungry as Radha or Kamala is feeling hungry and at the same time Radha is also feeling hungry. The ambiguity can be removed by specifying the theme of comparison for quality or quantity. If *poola* in the above type of construction is replaced by *aḷavu* 'that much' and *attaṉai* 'that many/much', the quantity will be specified and if *poola* is replaced by *maatiri* which means 'manner', the quality will be specified.

(42) kamalaavukku raatai attaṉai pasi 'Kamala is as hungry as Radha'
(43) kamalaavukku raatai aḷavukku pasi 'Kamala is as hungry as Radha'
(44) kamalaavukku raatai maatiri pasi 'Kamala is feeling hungry like Radha'

In the same way sentences (29) and (30) can be specified for quantity by replacing *poola* by *attaṉai* or *aḷavu*.

(45) kamalaa raatai attaṉai naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked about the same distance as Radha'

(46) kamalaavukku raatai attaṉai ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has as many sarees as Radha has'

maatiri is ambiguous like *poola*, though it generally specifies quality.

(47) kamalaa raataiyai maatiri naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked like Radha'

(48) kamalaavukku raataiyai maatiri ceelai irukkiRatu 'Kamala has sarees like Radha'

The interpretations made in the case of (29) and (30) can be made for (47) and (48) also.

Another way of specifying quantity is by introducing *ettaṉai.....attaṉai* 'how many.....that many' and *evvaḷavu.....avvaḷavu* 'how much.....that much'.

(49) raataikku ettaṉai ceelai irukkiRatoo attaṉai ceelai kamalaavukkum irukkiRatu 'Kamala has the same number of sarees as Radha has' *ettaṉai...attaṉai* and *evvaḷavu...avvaḷavu* can be equated with the English equative markers "as many...as" and "as much...as" respectively. Similarly for specifying quality *eppaṭi...appaṭi* 'what manner...that manner', *evvaaRu...avvaaRu* 'what way...that way' and *enta maatiri...anta maatiri* 'what manner...that manner' can be used.

(50) raatai eppaṭi naṭantaaḷoo appaṭi kamalaavum naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked in the same manner as Radha walked'

(51) raatai evvaaRu naṭittaaḷoo avvaaRu kamalaavum naṭittaaḷ 'Kamala acted in the same way as Radha'

(52) raataiyiṭam enta maatiri ceelai irukkiRatoo anta maatiri ceelai kamalaavukkum irukkiRatu 'Kamala has a saree similar to Radha's'

poola slightly varies in meaning depending on the context. In the following context *poola* means 'resemble'.

(53) kamalaa raataiyai poola irukkiRaaḷ 'Kamala resembles Radha The resemblance can be further defined by the degree adverbs like *eeRakku-Raiya* 'more or less', *kittaṭattaṭta* 'almost', etc.

(54) kamalaa eeRakkuRaiya raataiyai poola irukkiRaaḷ 'Kamala roughly resembles Radha'

(55) kamalaa kittaṭattaṭta raatiyai poola irukkiRaaḷ 'Kamala almost resembles Radha'

The emphatic *-ee* or *taaṉ* intensifies the nearness in resemblance.

(56) kamalaa raataiyai poolavee irukkiRaaḷ 'Kamala resembles Radha very much'

(57) kamalaa raataiyai poolattaaṉ irukkiRaaḷ 'Kamala resembles Radha very much'

Exact resemblance can be made by equating the item to be compared with the standard of comparison by emphatic -ee and *taaṉ*.

(58) kamalaa raataiyee taan 'Kamala is exactly like Radha'

The resemblance can be diminished by replacing the verb *iru* 'to be' by *tooṉRu* 'to appear'.

(59) kamalaa raataiyai poola tooṉRukiRaaḷ 'Kamala looks like Radha'

In the following context *poola* means 'look as if'.

(60) avaṉ kaḷḷaṉai poola irukkiRaaṉ 'He looks as if a thief'

Here the standard of comparison is a thief and the theme of comparison is not explicit. The theme may be the features or qualities which one expects from a thief. The subject of comparison has got some qualities or features which a thief is expected to have and that is why doubted for a thief. *poola* 'means' a doubt in this context.

One can notice similarity in quality expressed in the following constructions.

(61) muttu pooḷRa pal 'pearls like teeth'

(62) taamarai pooḷRa mukam 'lotus like face'

Generally *pooḷRa* will be dropped and we get the compounds *muttu pal* and *taamarai mukam*. *pooḷRa* is the relativized form of the defective verb (co-verb) *pool* 'similar'.

samamaaka 'equally' and *iṇaiyaaka* 'equally' can replace *poola* in some contexts. In that case the standard of comparison will be marked for dative.

(63) kamalaa raataikku samamaaka paaṭiṉaaḷ 'Kamala sang equally well like Radha'

(64) kamalaa raataikku iṇaiyaaka paaṭiṉaaḷ 'Kamala sang equally well like Radha'

The similarity can be expressed by marking the quality under comparison for location and placing the nominal compounds of *samamaaṉa* and *iṇaiyaaṉa* (adjectival forms) in the predicate position. The standard of comparison will be marked for dative.

(65) a*ḻ*akil kamalaa raataikku iṇaiyaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is equivalent to Radha in beauty'

In the following example the subject of comparison and standard of comparison are co-ordinated by *-um*.

(66) a*ḻ*akil kamalaavum raataiyum samamaaṉavarkaḷ 'Kamala is equivalent to Radha in beauty'

The similarity in quality can be expressed by the word *oṉRu* which means 'same'. The theme of comparison will be marked for location and *oṉRu* will occupy the predicate position. The subject of comparison and the standard of comparison will be co-ordinated by *-um*.

(67) a*ḻ*akil kamalaavum raataiyum oṉRu 'Kamala and Radha are same as far as the beauty is concerned'

In the following example *nikar* 'similar' stand to equate for sameness.

(68) a*ḻ*akil kamalaa raataikku nikar 'Kamala is equivalent to Radha in beauty'

Comparison of Inequality :

If two or more items are found to be different qualitatively and/or quantitatively, they can be subjected to comparison of inequality. Sentence (3)

(3) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa a*ḻ*akaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'

shows the relative difference between the items of comparison. It means that Kamala is more beautiful when compared with Radha. The standard of

comparison which is marked for accusative is postposed by *vita* (the comparator). *vita* is a derivative from the verb *vitu* means 'leave'. The sentence literally means "By leaving (excepting) Radha, Kamala is a beautiful girl", *vita* freely varies with *kaattilum* (the conditional form derived from the verb *kaattu* 'show').

(69) kamalaa raataiyai kaaṭṭilum aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'

The postposition *vita* and *kaattilum* are comparable to the English comparative marker "more...than". In Tamil, the comparative degree is not marked in the quality or quantity under comparison as opposed to English. (In English -er as in "bigger" and 'more' as in "more beautiful" are used as comparative degree markers.). The intensifiers *rempa* 'more', *atikam* 'much', *koncam* 'a few', *mika* 'very', *veku* 'very', etc. can be used for the intensification of difference.

(70) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa rempa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'

(71) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa mikavum naṉRaaka paaṭiṉaaḷ 'Kamala sang much better than Radha'

paarkkilum, the conditional form of the verb *paar* 'see', can replace both *viṭa* and *kaaṭṭilum* to denote comparison.

(72) kamalaa raataiyai paarkkilum aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'

A similar conditional form *paarkkaiyil* replace *paarkkilum* in spoken language

(73) raataiyai paarkkaiyil kamalaa koḷḷaam 'Kamala is better than Radha

The sentence (73) literally means 'When you see Radha, Kamala is better'

Ganerally an action should be specified for quantity or quality.

(74) *kamalaa raataiyai viṭa naṭantaaḷ *'Kamala walked than Radha'

(75) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa veekamaay naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked faster than Radha'

(76) *kamalaa raataiyai viṭa tiṉRaaḷ *'Kamala ate than Radha'

(77) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa kuuṭutal tiṉRaaḷ 'Kamala ate more than Radha'

But for certain feelings the attribution is optional.

(78) kamalaavukku raataiyai viṭa pasi 'Kamala is hungrier than Radha'

(79) kamalaavukku raataiyai viṭa kuuṭutal pasi 'Kamala is hungrier than Radha'

poola can replace *viṭa* when the theme of comparison is attributed for quality or quantity in times.

(80) kamalaa raataiyai viṭa pattu maṭanku aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is ten times beautiful than Radha'

(81) kamalaa raataiyai poola pattu maṭanku aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is ten times more beautiful than Radha'

poola refers to the quality of Radha, *maṭanku* multiplies this quality and attributes it to Kamala.

The standard of comparison can be marked for dative as in the following example.

(82) raataikku kamalaa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than Radha'

This kind of construction is preferably used when the comparison is made for *koḷḷaam, teevalai* or *paravaayillai.*

(83) raataikku kamalaa koḷḷaam 'Kamala is better than Radha'

An action or a feeling should be attributed by a quantitative adverb like *kuuṭutal* 'more', *meelee* 'more', *kuRaivaaka* 'less', etc. Even if the action is attributed for quality, it should be further attributed by the quantitative adverb.

(84) *raataikku kamalaavukku pasi

(85) kamalaavukku raataikkum kuuṭutal pasi 'Kamala is hungrier than Radha'

(86) *raataikku kamalaa tiṉRaaḷ

(87) kamalaa raataikkum kuuṭutal tiṉRaaḷ 'Kamala ate more than Radha'

(88) *raataikku kamalaa veekamaay naṭantaaḷ

(89) kamalaa raataikkum kuuṭutal veekamaay naṭantaaḷ 'Kamala walked faster than Radha'

-um added after the dativized standard is optional.

The comparison can be made by adding the ablative marker to the noun denoting the standard of comparison as in the following example.

(90) kamalaa raataiyilruntum aintu vayatu muuppu 'Kamala is older to Radha by five years'

The ablative *iliruntu* function like *viṭa*. The emphatic *—um* after ablative is optional.

Comparison can be made by using the compound verb *oppiṭṭu-paar* 'compare'.(*oppiṭu* 'compare', *paar* 'see'). The standard of comparison will be marked for commitative and the verb will be inflected for conditional *—aal* 'if'.

(91) rataiyooṭu oppiṭṭu paarttaal kaamalaa rempa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'When compared with Radha, Kamala is very beautiful'

The sentence(4)

(4) kamalaa anta peṇkaḷil aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is the most beautiful among those girls'

shows the absolute difference between the items compared. The sentence means that Kamala is the most beautiful among the girls grouped under the class in which Kamala is a member. In the sentence (4), the standard of

comparison is marked for locative —*il*. The superlative degree is unmarked. (In English the superlative degree is marked by "most" or by the suffix —est as in "most beautiful" and "biggest" respectively.). If the standard of comparison is attributed for 'all' the emphatic —*um* will be obligatorily added after the locative —*il*.

(92) kamalaa anta peṇkaḷ elloorilum aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is the most beautiful among all those girls'

(93) imayamalai ellaa malaikaḷilum periyatu 'Himalaya is the the biggest among all the mountains'

The sentence (4) can be paraphrased by the comparator *vita* also.

(94) kamalaa anta peṇkaḷai viṭa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is more beautiful than those girls'

More superiority is implied in the following comparative construction where the standard of comparison is represented by a place.

(95) kamalaa inta kiraamattileeyee aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is the most beautiful girl in this village'

The other locative markers which can replace —*il* are —*uḷ* 'among' and —*muṉ* 'before'.

(96) anta peṇkaḷuḷ kamalaa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is beautiful among those girls'

(97) anta peṇkaḷmuṉ kamalaa aḻakaaṉavaḷ 'Kamala is beautiful before those girls'

As we had seen, comparative constructions in Tamil differ much from the same constructions in English. An analysis of comparative constructions in Tamil based on Transformational generative model will be more interesting.

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COLOPHON

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